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Principles of Child Care

5.7. Underlying the practice of caring for children are certain core values about the human body which Badaga encapsulate in a few proverbs and can sometimes be persuaded to talk about. What some of these proverbs point to is a need to accept human diversity, and even deformity. One asks rhetorically, "Will all begotten children be real children?" And another proverb makes the same comment in reference to dissimilarities between siblings: "The stomach that has given birth to various people is one; those people are of different sense and different complexion." Similarly, "Are there five even fingers ?" Deformities in children are not of course welcomed—"It is bad if you have a lame child; it is bad if you see a blind man"—yet the individual should not feel embarrassed about a defect: "After the boils have formed, what if you feel shy and repugnant about them ?" Chronic illness also has to be tolerated in relatives and treated: "Even if she coughs she is our woman; even if she looks thin she is a grander woman."

Several proverbs reflect a concern with that hardy anthropological question, the relative strength and influence of nurture and of nature in the individual's personality: "Even if one has forgotten one's own begotten children, one won't forget learnt [bad] habits;" the latter are more important than inborn senses. Indeed, some people would go blind rather than give up a bad habit: "Even if your eyes become black a learnt [bad] habit won't disappear." In direct contrast, though, "Inborn habits won't go away even if you burn a man." Badagas believe that inborn habits (*huttu buddi*) are permanent, whereas learnt ones (*katta buddi*) are not.

A number of proverbs relate to the family relationships that involve children, and the way youngesters should be brought up. A certain firmness is counseled: "Children should be brought up under control, and a disobedient wife should have been sent back home." Similarly, "It is said, if the children are to be good, the mother should be good enough [herself]". Badagas believe that children acquire their qualities from the mother. Even so, "That woman will not know the nature of the girl she gave birth to." Kindness and forgiveness are valued in dealing with children. Thus, "If we caress the head of an orphan boy, our own children will grow up of their own accord" (Metz 1864: 94); "Will a child die from the stripes of a mother ?" (Metz 1864: 97); "Cats and

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539 855 children are the same"—in that they cannot be properly controlled and so should be exempted from the rules of the household. And again: "If the child shits on your thigh, will you cut it right off?" It is recognized that bringing up children is no easy task: "Pacifying the children is no less a job than digesting the raw flesh of an animal" (Verghese 1963: 423).

Infancy

854 5.8. The socialization of the infant may have to begin with the education of the mother. Three or four days after the delivery she starts bathing the baby herself, but if this is her first child she will usually be helped for a couple of weeks by her own mother until she has learnt the correct procedure. No swaddling or tying of the child occurs (Jagor 1876: 199), but it is bundled up in old rags to keep it warm. As a proverb explains, "The child will grow fast with old rags, and the buffalo will grow fast with dung." It is for this reason that a pregnant woman keeps all old cloth. (More usually rags are made into pillows or bedding, or used at menstruation; and woollen rags are kept for bandages.) The child should always be kept in warm cloths, for it is believed that if his temperature is high it can be reduced to normal, but if it is lower than normal he cannot raise it. In the old days when no woollens were available, babies were covered with cotton folded to eight or ten thicknesses for greater warmth. Only used cloth is allowed, which is why the old rags are preserved; but if someone wants to give a baby a new cloth one of the parents should first wear it a little and rub it on the body so that it can be considered used.

825 5.9. Care is taken to keep a baby's face clean, especially during the first 40 or 50 days, when a cat might otherwise find milk on its face and either suffocate the baby or do it some harm.

539 514 It is accepted as natural that the nose often gets dirty: as a proverb puts it, "So long as the nose exists, won't there be mucus oozing from it?" As was mentioned earlier (2.11), the method of cleaning a baby's nose is to suck it and spit the mucus out. (If a woman has been chewing tobacco she washes her mouth out before doing this.) This method is considered more gentle than squeezing the nose; but after a child has reached six months relatives clean it with the index finger and thumb of either hand, or with a body cloth. Between the ages of three and five, depending on when the

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854 repeatedly saw K. Sithamma at the age of 75 suckling a small
[603] grandchild to quieten it.)

5.13. The arrival of a new baby necessarily brings changes in the
854 sleeping habits of a couple. When it is dusk the door of the house
513 must be closed tight, for fear that a "bad wind" or evil spirit might
342 enter and make the baby sick. This is compulsory until the fifth or
[753] sixth month of life: the door may not be opened again, even momentarily, until just before sunrise. If the father has not yet come home at dusk, then either the baby will go to a neighbouring house for the night or the father will have to sleep in one of them when he returns. In later infancy the door should be closed for the night at about 10 o'clock, and this practice will continue until the child is weaned.

854 When sleeping with her baby a woman's body is entirely nude,
513 for if she wore clothes they would prevent heat from reaching the
855 child from her body. Until a baby is six or seven months old the
[853] mother is advised to sleep with her back to it, and never to sleep while suckling: these precautions result from the fear the child may be suffocated by a breast. Thus if the mother wants to roll over on the bed she must first move the baby over. Usually the youngest one or two children sleep between their parents for warmth, with the unweaned infant always next to the mother. Alternatively mother and baby may use one bed, the father and older children occupying another bed. Sleeping with one's children is not altogether a comfortable situation: "The man who is sleeping with children and the man who is eating raw animal flesh are alike"—both experience difficulties. Other older children in the family may sleep together, but after reaching seven or eight girls sleep separately from their brothers, or else with their mother.

833 5.14. If a mother has intercourse right after giving birth this weakens
834 the womb for the next delivery, Badagas believe, and so they generally do not do it until five or six months afterwards. One man told me he had enjoyed his wife about three weeks after two of his children were born, and the children died after 52 and 54 days, presumably because of the weakening of their mother's milk. Because of such dangers men used to ask a new father in earlier days, "Are you wearing your loincloth at night?" The cloth was considered sufficient restraint on his passion.

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Early Childhood

5.15. At about the fifth month of life the child, surrounded by blankets or other protective matter, is made to sit up. In the sixth or seventh month he will start to crawl, and once he does this he will be allowed to sleep on the floor, but not on a cot or shelf from which he might fall. The relatives encourage a child to crawl, then to stand and walk, by placing little articles as bribes in front of it. A Badaga proverb says, "See the power of the baby's legs when it crawls; see the state of the young plant." This means that the child's future life is reflected in the way it crawls; and similarly, "Judge the little children by watching the good movement of their legs while dancing." If instead of crawling a baby stretches its legs forward while sitting, and then inches its bottom forward, it is said to be a lazy child. Conversely the one who crawls on hands and knees will be walking very soon.

5.16. Children begin talking at 12 to 18 months. The parents at first use a few onomatopoeic words with them, as well as special words for children like the "baby talk" of English. Thus there are words for commonplace matters like sleep, bathe, etc., and a meal (*hittu*) for example is called *ku* for babies; *ku* is in fact ceremonial food mixed with milk.

5.17. It is the prime duty of old people in the home to educate and care for their grandchildren and great-grandchildren, particularly because the parents are often working outside somewhere. If younger people spend too much of their working hours playing with the baby someone will make the snide remark that "The thief of work has the child as a pretext." Even though children now attend school it is still the elders who teach them to talk, and then explain to them much about Badaga life. To do this they tell the children both traditional tales and stories they make up for moral instruction. In this context children often hear the Badaga proverbs, which encapsulate so much of the customary morality. Many of the folktales the children are told and then made to repeat are animal stories with some clear ethical content. Now that children go to school it is most usually after supper when they urge the elders to tell them stories. Children over five are not interested in the animal fables, and so they are told somewhat more realistic stories about Kurumba sorcerers, or about tigers and jackals that take children away at night. Such stories are told to make the children afraid of these

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things. Love stories are not told to children under 13. The adults themselves are not really interested in stories, only in folksongs. Adults also sing to their children, and encourage them to learn special children's songs from an early age; but they do also pick up adult folksongs simply by listening to them.

5.18. Child upbringing does not appear to be particularly repressive. The relative freedom that smaller children enjoy is summed up in a proverb: "Children [left out on] the right-of-way will grow; children [kept in] the room get rotten." Children are disciplined by a variety of threats. They are told they will be given away, if bad, to a Golla mendicant or a Kurumba tribesman. The coming of a ghost, demon, or a vaccinator is another common threat; or they may be told a tiger or a pig will take them away. Otherwise people compare a bad child unfavourably with the behaviour of his childhood friend. These threats and comparisons have little effect on older children. From the age of five or six children are jokingly told about a certain cross-cousin who will come to marry them "next year." This threat or promise is also used to enjoin proper behaviour: "If your wife saw you, she'd abuse you" (or conversely, "she'd marry you at once"). When there seems to be a choice among several cousins the parents may ask a child which he prefers, or threaten to bring a bad one to him if he misbehaves. The same treatment is used to discipline girls, with the additional possibility of telling a small girl she will be given away in marriage to a beggar, a Kota or a Kurumba, instead of to a Badaga husband. Adolescent children may not be disciplined so gently, and some of them are not unfamiliar with a rope's end.

Kindness and outright bribery are also lavished on children, as evidenced in the saying: "It is like influencing children by giving them crude sugar."

5.19. Between the ages of five and seven children go through a transition marked by some major changes in their daily habits. In the old days some girls would become child-brides after reaching the age of five. Nowadays the transition means spending much of the week in school instead of at home. There are other changes too. The children begin to eat from their own plates. Girls stop sleeping with their fathers, though they may continue to sleep with their mothers or with other children. Boys are now embarrassed to sleep with their mothers or sisters. If there are several boys or several girls of similar age on one street they now band together